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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify strategies used by successful readers in comprehending and interpreting various kinds of texts. Seventy-three graduate students were asked to keep a journal (unedited and freely written) of what they were thinking as they were reading Umberto Eco's novel "The Name of the Rose." Selected journal entries were divided into 771 introspective commentaries that were marked by a shift in topic or attention on the part of the reader between and among "reader," "text," or "context" codes, plus the extended discussion of what the reader made of such shifts in attention. For purposes of coding response types, a "reading strategy" was defined as a cognitive choice--visualize, compare, criticize, etc. Adjusting rate, underlining, and taking notes were defined as a "reading technique." Results suggest that mentally good readers spend about 69% of their time off the page attempting to make connections, recasting what they have read in terms of what they currently know, criticizing themselves and the author's performance, and/or extrapolating what they have read to see what it might have to say about everything from ethnography to the meaning of life. Findings support the contextual embeddedness of all reading and interpretation and how instructional tasks can bolster the use of reading as a tool for learning. (Data tables are appended.) (NKA)

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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE STRATEGIC: GOOD READERS AS INFORMANTS

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What it means to be strategic

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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE STRATEGIC: GOOD READERS AS INFORMANTS

Current evidence would suggest that although there is a single reading process, in its specific detail it gets played out differently depending on the setting in which it occurs. Reading a novel is different from reading a science report. This understanding is the basic premise underlying a socio-psycholinguistic or socio-cognitive model of reading (Langer, 1986). Although any instance of reading might strategically involve visualizing, metaphor, and other cognitive operations, a socio-psycholinguistic model of reading hypothesizes that various strategies get foregrounded and backgrounded across different types of settings.

In conducting a review of instructional research in reading comprehension, several researchers have noted a lack of basic research relative to the strategies that successful readers use in comprehending and interpreting various kinds of texts (see Crismore, 1985; Spiro, in process). What few studies have been conducted have focused on on-line meaning maintenance in narrative materials by examining oral

language miscues (see Goodman & Burke, 1973 as an example) and the on-line monitoring or error detection strategies that good readers use or fail to use while their eyes are on the page (see Winograd & Johnston, 1982 as an example). Recently Olshavsky (1976) and Pritchard (in process) have used protocol analysis to examine the strategies that readers use in comprehending story materials, but these studies, like their predecessors, focus on on-line comprehension rather than on how readers interpret and use text to learn. This lack of knowledge is problematic for those who advocate a process approach to curriculum. While a process approach to the teaching of reading seems to suggest that teachers allow children to engage in, see demonstrated, and come to value the key socio-psycholinguistic strategies involved in successful language use and learning, research has not provided a clear picture of what these strategies are nor how they get played out in different contexts of situations by successful readers.

This report is part of a program of research designed to identify what good readers cognitively do to interpret complex text of various types. To date one set of data has been collected from readers as they read a variety of print -- a novel, a professional article, a recipe, a newspaper, a poem, etc.; another set of data from English majors as they read poetry; and a third set of data from adult readers as they read a complex novel. The study reported here focuses on the strategies that readers use in interpreting a complex narrative text.

METHOD

For this study graduate students in four graduate classes at a major midwestern university were used (population = 73). It was assumed that students enrolled in advanced graduate study were good readers and, if not good, at least successful with "school-based literacy tasks" (Heath, in process; Raphael 1986).

The journal entries from twenty students as they read the first 100 pages of

Umberto Eco's novel, *The name of the Rose* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980) constitute the specific sample studied. Five journals were selected from each course in order to study how instructional constraints and content foci varied and affected the reading process. Given the final grade distribution and knowledge of how particular students had responded in course activities and discussions, a representative range of journal types were selected for analysis.

The directions given to students read:

> I'm interested in what good readers do to make sense out of complex texts. I want you to keep a journal of what you are thinking about as you read Umberto Eco's, *The Name of the Rose*. I don't want you to edit your thoughts based on what you think I will see as relevant, but rather, if you catch yourself thinking about something -- no matter how unrelated it may seem to you -- report it. You have four weeks to finish this novel. The chapters in the book are short. As you catch yourself thinking about something just make a note of it in the margin. Then when you finish a chapter take out your journal and record what you were thinking about and what specifically set off this line of thought. If new thoughts come to you as you are writing, record these too, only indicate which were thoughts you had while reading and which were thoughts you had while writing.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was begun by comparing the journal entries received in this study to protocols collected by stopping readers at the end of selected paragraphs and asking them to relate what they were thinking about as they were reading. This comparison suggested that the retrospective journal protocols collected in this study involved long term memory as opposed to short term memory and dealt with how readers went about interpreting or learning from text rather than just making sense of it.

Convinced that the procedure selected allowed insight into the interpretive procedures that good readers use when reading a novel, data analysis began by simply reading and rereading journal entries in an effort to identify the theory of reading that was in place for each informant. Entries in journals were divided into 771 introspective commentaries. Introspective commentaries were marked by a shift in topic or attention on the part of the reader between and among "reader," "text," --

"context" codes, plus the extended discussion of what the reader made of such shift in attention. Interrater reliability in the identification of introspective commentaries was .92. Readers made 1359 responses to their reading in these 771 introspective commentaries (approximately 1.7 responses per commentary; interrater reliability .89). For purposes of coding response types, a *reading strategy* was defined as something cognitive that a reader might do -- visualize, compare, critique, etc. Adjusting rate, underlining, and taking notes were defined as a *reading technique.*

The following journal entries represent the range and type of entries that students made in journals within a single course. Despite differences in stance, cognitively what each reader did in order to interpret this text is much the same. Before developing this argument, a specific understanding of the interpretive strategies that readers employed is needed.

> Journal Entry 1.02 (EH) *I have never met Eco, but have heard of him and have this image of a very serious, scholarly semiotician who speaks solely in profound abstractions. I found myself continually referring back to that image and remaking a more human image in light of the very human things I was reading. Because of this serious and scholarly image, I'm not sure whether or not the explanation before the prologue is true. Eco might be the kind of guy to which this could have happened. Had this been any other author, I would automatically assume this section was fictional.*

Readers EH took a predictable stance given the course context, an advanced doctoral seminar on reading. In Journal Entry 1.02 Reader EH contrasts the abstract impression she had of Eco, the scholar, with her actual experience of Eco from reading him. This conflict leads her to alter her reading stance as well as causes her some problems in knowing how to interpret Eco's attempts to make it appear that his novel is based on finding a real manuscript. With other authors she would interpret this play as fiction, but with Eco she isn't sure she can or should.

> **Journal Entry 2.11 (KM)** *I am so thrilled to have a legitimate excuse for making time to read a novel! I resent taking a pencil to the reading for making marks in the margins - and do so primarily, though not entirely, because I have been encouraged to do so. Secondly, because a novel does not segment itself as a content piece does, I must force myself to stop reading and to begin writing these reflections. Even now I am anxious to return to the text to see what comes of this meeting between these two delegations.*

In Journal Entry 2.11 Reader KM notes the conflict between her impression of how and why one reads a novel with the research procedure used. Essentially there is a conflict or tension between codes. Reading a novel is supposed to have a certain feel about it. Taking notes on one's reading has another feel. This tension between codes is inconsistent and merits comment, reaction, and response.

> **Journal Entry 3.06 (BP)** *I'm struck by the parallels to Sherlock Holmes. Foremost, there's the way in which Eco infers the information about the horse, but beyond that: (1) the relationship between William and Adso is like Holmes and Watson; (2) Adso narrating, like Watson, is a period considerably after the events being described; (3) Adso's obvious admiration to his 'master'; (4) William's remark while explaining his thinking concerning the horse, i.e., 'I am almost embarrassed to repeat to you what you should know' -- could have been taken directly from Conan Doyle; (5) even the name -- William of Baskerville -- is not far from Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street and, of course, there's his best known adventure, 'The Hounds of Baskerville.'*

Reader BP read the book as a murder mystery rather than as a treatise on literacy or even semiotics. In Journal Entry 3.06 Reader BP metaphorically compares Eco, the author of *The Name of the Rose*, and Doyle, the author of *Sherlock Holmes*, through a detailed and insightful comparative analysis of the two texts. Notice particularly the extended analysis and multiple connections or "intertextual ties" (Beaugrande, 1980) that have been made.

Reading as a Tension Between Codes. Figure 1 illustrates the range of codes or signifying structures that can be identified in journal entries that readers attended to while reading. While some of these involved the text, others involved

treating their own processing as a code and contrasting this code to how it was they were taught to read.

Typically a journal entry reflected a tension between two or more codes. Keeping a journal conflicted with the reader's sense of what reading a novel should be like. The author's knowledge of church history conflicted with the reader's knowledge of church history and this tension between codes merited reaction, response, and a reader self-critique. Some entries reflected confirmation between codes, i.e., the reader's knowledge of semiotics compared favorably with the author's knowledge of semiotics, but these instances were rare (28% as opposed to 72%) and typically involved newly acquired knowledge. For the most part, good readers focused all of their attention on the new (to learn or reconfirm) rather than on the old.

Coding Signifying Structures In attempting to think through how this study could be the most useful to researchers and practitioners alike, a taxonomy was developed for understanding the range of codes involved in reading. Overall the date in Figure 2 indicates that good readers spend a lot of time monitoring codes other than text. Even when text is involved it is rarely the only kind of code involved. These data suggest that good readers understand, monitor, and actively adapt to the constraints they perceive operating in the instructional setting, as well as attend very closely to their own reading processing as well as their responses or lived-through experiences while reading (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Although various schemes were used to classify the codes good readers attend to during reading, Halliday & Hasan's (1980) definitions of "field," "mode," and "tenor" as "universal components in any language context" proved the most workable. "Field," according to Halliday & Hasan (44% of all journal entries), refers to "what's happening," or the various "topics on the floor" or "informational contents

that are involved" and affect the language event. "Field" codes were set up by the reader's instructional history to the bits and pieces of content introduced in the text itself. "Mode" in Halliday and Hasan's framework (34% of all journal entries) refers to "the channels of communication evolved in the language setting." "Mode" codes were set up by everything from keeping a journal to monitoring the lived through experence of reading. "Tenor" (22% of all commentaries) references "the social relationships involved" in reading. Surprisingly, author/reader relationships were particularly salient. EH commented in her journal, "The personality of the author was significant to readers in terms of their differing levels of familiarity...We read the novel in terms of who we are and also in terms of who we think he is...My guess is that we do that to some degree whenever we read...Would it help students become better readers if they become cognizant of this strategy?"

Strategic Reading: Varying Process by Content & Context. Figure 3 summarizes the major cognitive moves that good readers made in responding to the reading of a complex novel. Given these data it can be said that good readers reading a complex novel spend about one/third of their time (33%) varying their cognitive processing in terms of content and context. If and when they don't understand medieval history, it doesn't stop them, but it does mean that they have to choose an appropriate stance and employ reading techniques to cope. In fact to vary cognitive processing by content and by context is to operationally define what it means to be a strategic reader.

This definition is important in that it suggests that efforts to look at reading by crossing any two of these three factors -- process by context; context by content; content by process -- is misguided. In order to understand "strategicness," readers must vary all three -- process, content, and context --

simultaneously (see Snyder, 1986).

Good Readers Monitor the Reading Experience Itself. Readers in this study also spent about one/third of their time (33%) monitoring their in-process reading experiences as well as their response to these experiences. In responding they became consciously aware of the strategies they were using and, more often than not, ended up by critiquing their own knowledge and reading performance. Good readers, this data suggests, are a guilt ridden lot. They are never satisfied with their reading ability, their current ability to interpret and make sense of text, their current ability to adapt, nor their current level of knowledge. Interestingly, it is this guilt that seems to drive the reading process forward.

Unlike readers at risk, however, these readers have techniques for coping. Often readers re-employ old techniques for new ends. Underlining, a technique one typically associates with the marking of salient information in text, was used to "slow down the process," "check the logic of information in the text," and "mark connections that aren't so obvious." Though the surface-structure -- underlining, for example -- stayed the same, the deep-structure or cognitive function that the technique served changed from and between instances of use.

Reflexivity & Learning: The Long Arms of Comprehension. Good readers also spent about one/third of their time (34%) being reflexive. For purposes of analysis "reflexivity" was defined, following Herzfeld (1985), as "the use of one's self to outgrow one's self." By this definition reflexivity entails strategically using one's self as an instrument of growth.

At every opportunity good readers assumed personal relevance and connectedness, debated the significance of what they had read, and took the time to rethink past decisions. In many ways they made reading a social event by dialogically engaging

in conversation with themselves or an imagined audience. Discussion in class were often picked up as discussions in journals. What had been a form of social action became a form of psychological action (for similar observations see Corsaro, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978 and Rowe, 1986).

Key Assumptions: Intentionality & Unified Meaning. Several other things characterize these readers. All approached text assuming intentionality and a unified meaning. Good readers identify codes (or potential codes) even prior to knowing what these codes mean or what to make of them. When they encounter an anomaly -- something that doesn't click -- they attend closely assuming intentionality. This assumption leads them to predict, to search for new clues in the text, and to test hypotheses via logic. This process of hypothesizing sets up alternate possible interpretations and meanings which get played out and tested as reading continues. Reading for these informants was a learning process; an ongoing and active search for patterns that connect (Short, 1986; Siegel, 1985).

Often rather than generate a single theme or macrostructure, these readers kept two or three themes going simultaneously. Eco's text can be read as a murder mystery; a short course on semiotics, church history, or medieval values; and/or as an extended argument for an expanded definition of literacy. Good readers accept as well as expect multiple layers of meaning and connectedness.

I initially thought that the best readers in my sample kept more themes running than less proficient readers in the sample. When I analyzed my own journal, I discovered that I was defining very good readers to be those who selected the themes I have selected; any reader who selected a different set of themes was being defined by me as less proficient.

Mentally good readers -- regardless of their stance -- spend about 69% of their time off the page, mentally attempting to make connections, recasting what they have

read in terms of what they currently know, critiquing themselves and the author's performance, and/or extrapolating what they have read to see what it might have to say about everything from ethnography to the meaning of life. The range of responses readers make demonstrates both "the long arm of comprehension" and the role that "the potential to learn" plays in propelling the reading process.

DISCUSSION

This report is but one of a series planned by the author to study the strategies that good readers use in comprehending and interpreting texts in a variety of settings. Clearly there are many contextual constraints that good readers monitor when reading. Data in this study are dependent upon a specific text and a limited set of contexts and contents.

While it might be generalized that strategic readers vary process by content and context, the specifics of this adaptation are played out in each instance of reading. Readers in this study spent an inordinate amount of time monitoring their own reading process. One must assume that these figures are in part a function of the research context and the task of keeping a reflexive journal. Rather than signal a problem with the study, this finding supports the contextual embeddedness of all reading and interpretation and how the instructional tasks we create can support the use of reading as a tool for learning. The contexts we create as well as who suggests what we read strongly affects the stance that is taken as well as the outcome of the reading experience itself.

The major limitation of this study is that it whets rather than sates our appetite. Given that educators must act come Monday morning, application must proceed cautiously and reflexively if teachers and researchers are to learn the most important lesson that these informants have taught.

Figure 1. Codes attended to by a single reader KM

READER CODES

--What is known about various topics,
  i.e., medieval history, church history, semiotics., etc.
--What is known about this author and his personality
--What is generally known about academics and their personality
--What one believes writers are obliged to do; i.e.,
  their roles and responsibilities to readers
--What is known about a genre of literature; how it works and
  what techniques authors typically use to engage readers (murder mystery)
--What strategies ideal readers use when encountering difficulties
  with text (instructional history)
--Strategies actually used in reading
--The "feel" one gets reading a novel
--What it's like to keep a reflective journal
--The lived through experience of reading itself
--The techniques used to cope while reading

TEXT CODES

--Latin words and phrases
--Lexical cohesion
--Text unity (how multimodal components are orchestrated)
--The inclusion of maps and graphics in the text
--The authors writing style
--The text genre
--The perspective from which the book is written
--Chapter introductions (headers)

CONTEXT CODES

--What the instructor wants
--Who is teaching the course
--Who assigns the reading
--The theoretical interest and bias of the instructor
--What a typical doctoral seminar is like
--The relationship one typically expects to find between book choices
  and course content
--The topic and content of the course
--The directions that were given
--The topics discussed in class
--Positions classmates have taken in course discussions
--Classmate interpretations of the text in class
--Other life experiences which share the same time frame

Figure 2. Distribution of codes discussed in journals (N=771)

FIELD (What's Happening)			342	44%
On line meaning maintenance	25	3%		
Knowledge domains	242	31%		
Instructional History	21	3%		
Instructional Setting	54	7%		
MODE (Channels of Communication Involved)			261	34%
Processing/Writing	22	3%		
Processing/Reading	104	14%		
Illustrations/Graphics	39	5%		
Writing Style	96	13%		
TENOR (Social Relationships)			168	22%
Reader/Reader	23	3%		
Reader/Readers	24	3%		
Reader/Author(s)	92	12%		
Reader/Instructor	29	4%		

Figure 3. Reader response types and assumptions (N=1359)

Types	N	%
Varies process by content & context --understands constraints --chooses and accepts a stance --reflectively employs techniques to cope	450	33%
Monitors the reading experience --assesses author to note differences in language/knowledge/intent --monitors interpretations and mental trips --makes strategies conscious --assesses personal knowledge and competency/performance	447	33%
Takes time to reflexively grow --assigns personal relevancy and connectedness --dialogically explores significance --rethinks decisions	462	34%
Assumptions		
Assumes intentionality and a unified meaning --explores multiple layers of meaning --seeks patterns that connect --focuses on congruences and tensions --uses logic to make ties and resolve doubt	NA	NA

NA=not applicable

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